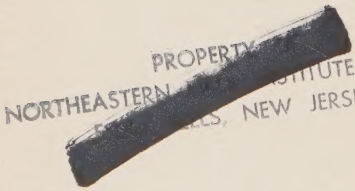
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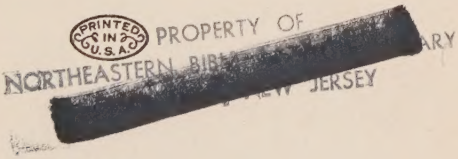
NOTES

ON THE

BOOK of ESTHER

By H. A. Ironside

Author of "Mysteries of God;" "Minor Prophets;"
"Praying in the Holy Spirit;" "The Four Hundred Silent Years;"
"Lectures on Daniel;" "Lectures on the Revelation," etc., etc.



LOIZEAUX BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
1 East 13th Street, New York

WESTERN BOOK AND TRACT CO.
1730 Telegraph Ave., Oakland, Calif.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE book of Esther contains principles of great value at all times, but especially at the present one, when some who delve very little into the word of God are liable to wonder at some of His ways, and grow discouraged in the path of obedience.

It is needful therefore, that such, and all of us, should have detailed before us the fact that "obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." May God richly bless your effort to bring to the surface what His Spirit has laid up for us in this little book.

Yours affectionately in Christ,

PAUL J. LOIZEAUX.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION

A NEW edition of this little book being called for, I have taken the opportunity to correct a few ambiguities, and make occasional additions to the text. Otherwise, it is a reprint of the previous edition. I have been encouraged by expressions from many, telling of blessing received through its unpretentious pages, and I send forth this revised edition, praying God to continue to own and bless it for the salvation of the Christless, and the edification of His beloved people.

H. A. IRONSIDE.

Oakland, Calif.
December, 1921.

INTRODUCTION

NO attentive reader can fail to note the great distinguishing characteristic of the book of Esther: the name of God is not found in it. No divine title whatever, nor any pronoun referring to God is there in its ten stirring chapters. Neither is there any reference to prayer which involves the thought of God as the hearer and answerer. At first glance it might seem that the book of Esther is not unique in this, as the Song of Solomon apparently keeps company with it in the omission of any title of the Deity. But it is not really so; for the name "Jah" (the Eternal) is, in the original, found in the last clause of chap. viii. 6. "Jealousy is as cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a *most vehement flame;*" (literally as noted in the margin, "a flame of Jah"). And even if this were not the case, still the bridegroom is so evidently Jehovah, whose bride Israel was and shall yet be manifested to be, that almost every masculine pronoun may be said to refer to Him. The Song of Songs therefore is really a perfect contrast with the book of Esther, being from end to end full of Jehovah as the Bridegroom of Israel.

In Esther it is quite different. Neither His name, nor any reference to Him, even veiled, is found. At least so it is on the page of the English version. Whether there may be any divine purpose in the reputed fact that the name of Jehovah (Hebrew I H V H) is found there in acrostics four times I do not pretend to say. The passages in which they are said to occur are chap. i. 20, "all the wives shall give;" v. 4, "let the king and Haman come this day;" and v. 13, "all this availeth me nothing;" and vii. 7, "that there was evil determined against him." Properly speaking God is entirely unmentioned: but no believer in the plenary inspiration of Scripture would conclude from this that His voice speaks not to us in this writing as in all the rest of the sacred Oracles.

One rather asks: Why has He inspired so strange a book; and what is His reason for omitting His name?

The answer, as the question, may be a double one. First: in this book we have Israel in what was really a self-chosen path, for opportunity had been given to return to the land of their fathers, there to rebuild the city of God, but they preferred to remain where they were rather than endure the hardship of emigrating to Canaan. They were in Persia and Babylon when they might have been in Palestine, gathered around God's centre at Jerusalem. Second: the great subject of Esther is

evidently the secret providence—a "particular" providence too—which is ever watching over the scattered nation during all the long-drawn-out "times of the Gentiles."

In Hosea i. 9, we read of the prophet's son: "Then said God; call his name Lo-ammi (not My people) for ye are not My people and I will not be your God." Because of their disobedience, He was about to refuse to own them, and to permit them to be carried into captivity among the nations. In this condition are they found over two hundred years later, in the times of Esther and Mordecai.

He who had borne with their ways for so long had at last given them up in chastisement, and allowed the Gentile oppressor to destroy the city and the temple, and to transport them to Babylon; there to learn in affliction what they would not learn in years of blessing and forbearance.

The Babylonian conqueror had however in his turn been overthrown by the Persian, under whose mild rule the dispersed Jews now were. It had pleased the Lord to give a little reviving in the midst of their bondage, and a few years before the time of the first verse of our book, He had stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to issue a proclamation to the effect that all who had heart for it might return to Jerusalem and "build the house of the Lord God of Israel" (Ezra i. 1-3). As a result there "rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and

Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all whose spirit God had raised to go to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra i. 5).

With this remnant, feeble indeed, and few in number, the Lord is pleased in grace to connect His name, although the Lo-ammi sentence remains unrepealed; for we find that if the Name is absent in recording His care over those who remained in Babylon, it is abundantly present in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which detail the experiences of the remnant to whom the place of the Name was precious, as it could not be to those who abode elsewhere—even in ease and comparative luxury. It is true it is as "the God of heaven" He makes Himself known to them; but what title more suitable when all earthly glory had departed? and to heaven they now looked for the coming Anointed Deliverer. Among those who went up there was much to grieve and sadden; much failure and sin;—yet they were gathered around Himself in His own appointed place, in accordance with His own Word. Hence, He raises up ministry suited to their need, and is not ashamed to link His Name with them.

If Ahasuerus, the great king, be Xerxes, as is generally believed, the history of the book of Esther would come in, chronologically, between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra; that is, between the

times when the first company returned to Jerusalem, and that when Ezra and his company went up. In that case we can well understand the fervent faith evidenced by this dear servant of God who "was ashamed to require of the king (Artaxerxes Longimanus, successor to Xerxes) a band of soldiers and horsemen to keep us against the enemy in the way: because we had spoken to the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but his wrath is against all that forsake Him" (Ezra viii. 22). How signally had this been proven but a short time before in the triumph of Esther!

If, as others contend, Artaxerxes himself be the Ahasuerus referred to, it might account for the stirring of heart that led Ezra and this second company to go up in faith to join their brethren in the city that was now rising slowly from its ashes. In either case, God Himself had wrought in their souls, and they went up to the land of their ancient patrimony because of their desire to glorify Him.

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF ESTHER

CHAPTER I

THE ROYAL FEAST, AND DIVORCE OF VASHTI.

IN the opening verses we note the wide extent of the Persian dominion. "Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred, seven and twenty provinces,) that in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, in the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him: when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days, even a hundred and fourscore days" (vers. 1-4).

These verses bring before us something of the earthly grandeur and glory of the "silver" kingdom, which had succeeded the "head of gold," depicted in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, as recorded in the

second chapter of Daniel. World-wide dominion would be exercised by but four powers till He should come whose right it is to reign, and should set up a kingdom that shall break in pieces all the others, and shall never be destroyed. This was what God had pictured to the king in the dream of the great image whose head was of gold, with breasts of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of mingled iron and clay.

The sphere of lordship is larger in the case of each succeeding empire, and yet the metal ever deteriorates, from gold to the iron mixed with miry clay, or, according to Tregelles, brittle pottery; the reason doubtless consisting in this, that Babylon presents to us an absolutely unlimited monarchy, while in Persia, Greece and Rome the powers of the chief become more or less circumscribed, first, by assistant counselors, and at last by a sort of union of royalty and democracy, which will eventually result in the *election* of the final Roman emperor yet to come, in the days of the ten toes, which will be the last form assumed by the beast (Rev. xiii. 1-9) after the Church has been raptured away to heaven.*

It is certainly a splendid scene to which our

*What Nebuchadnezzar saw as a magnificent image was revealed to Daniel, the man of God, as a series of wild and ferocious beasts, the last of which is again made known to John in the Apocalypse (Dan. 7 and Rev. 13 and 17).

chapter introduces us, and in a certain sense, no doubt, a typical one. But it is clear that all is but the glory of this world, though not in the utter independence of God that we find in Dan. v. There is no mention of impiety connected with the feast described in the following verses: "And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; where were white, green and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds (or couches) were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble. . . . And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure" (vers. 5,6,8).

If in Israel's subjection to Babylon we get a picture of the days of darkness and bondage through which the Church passed during the ascendency of the papacy, it would seem that in the "liberal slavery" during the Medo-Persian supremacy, we have foreshadowed the present anomalous and outwardly prosperous condition of Protestantism. In other words, Babylon might be said to find its counterpart in Thyatira, when Satan sought to force the children of God to bow the knee

to idolatry—to commit spiritual adultery. Sardis answers more to the conditions of Esther's day—great outward prosperity, with a faithful few who have not defiled their garments, but nevertheless, on the part of the vast majority, a complete union between the world and the professing body. Philadelphia corresponds well with the returned remnant, while Laodicea is suggested by the Pharisaic outgrowth of self-righteousness and formality that followed. At least, it is plain that there are many striking similarities, which would seem to be more than mere coincidences.

Looking at it from this standpoint, while in Ezra and Nehemiah we have a people separated to the name of the Lord, gathered around God's centre, and, in measure at least, subject to His Word; in Esther we have a people equally the Lord's, quite content to go on with the world's patronage; and though here and there some are characterized by great devotion, there is in no sense the same liberty, blessing and understanding of the word of God as might have been theirs had they sought His glory more, rather than their own convenience.

This feast, then, is but the general rejoicing in the light and liberty afforded by the spread of knowledge and civilization—something far different from the feasts kept at Jerusalem, where all pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ—His sufferings and His glories.

No doubt the various colors of the hangings and furniture of the banquet hall may all have some typical meaning, but at present scholars are far from agreement as to the meaning of the words employed; so we do not attempt to enter into it. It is noticeable that "the drinking was according to the law: none did compel." What has been called "the right of private judgment" was fully recognized. The harlot of Rev. xvii, had in her hand a *golden** cup (for of *divine* things she professed to speak) full of abomination and filthiness. The language used in verse 2 seems to imply that she practically forced to the lips of the earth-dwellers the wine of her fornication. She would brook no objection. All *must* drink what she provided. This is ever the rule of the papacy. It is otherwise in Protestantism: you may drink or not, as you please. "None did compel;" and if you like not the design of the cup you have, there are plenty of others to choose from, all of gold, all alike professedly of God, and yet diverse one from the other.

Well it is for those who refuse every cup of man's design, and in lowliness and self-judgment are found poring over the word of God in the place where He has caused his name to dwell (Neh. viii. 3; ix. 3).

*Gold in Scripture is evidently typical or symbolical of the divine glory.

The wine is "royal wine" it is true, and it will exhilarate and excite and fill one with goodly thoughts of flesh and of the glory of earth; but it is not the wine that speaks of a Saviour's precious blood shed for guilty sinners, who in His very death upon the tree was telling out the judgment of this world. *That* is seen as you stand by the altar in the ruined city of God, and behold the drink-offering poured out upon the holocaust, ascending as a sweet savor to God (Ezra iii. 3).

The next few verses give us a picture which we find difficult to apply. When the feast had run on for seven days, the king, evidently inflamed by wine, sent for his queen Vashti to appear before the people and princes, to display her beauty. She had been banqueting with the women in the palace, and refused to obey the imperial mandate. Angered by her pertinacity, the king took counsel with his wise men as to what punishment he should mete out to her because she had not heeded his commandment.

At the suggestion of Memucan, she was put away and divorced in order that her example might not incite the women of the empire to act as she had done when their husbands laid any command upon them.

We are told that "the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan" (ver. 21), and published broad-

cast the official edict that Vashti was to come no more into his presence.

They all had agreed that she had proved untrue to her place as the leading woman of the empire, and that it must be given to another. One might suggest this as an illustration of Rom. xi,—the disobedience of the Gentiles giving occasion for the restoration of the Jews to the place of favor. But, shrinking from any interpretation which might not commend itself to the spiritual mind, we introduce our readers at once to the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER II.

THE CHOICE OF ESTHER AND THE TREASON THWARTED

WHEN the days of feasting and excitement described in our previous chapter had passed away, and the king had opportunity quietly to weigh his hasty action, his heart seems to have relented, as we are told in the first verse of chapter ii, that, "After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her." Bound by the law of the kingdom, which made it impossible for him to revoke his own imperial decree, he seems to have become a prey to a measure at least of remorse as he reflected on his way towards Vashti, of whom he had been so proud.

His servants, noticing his dejection, make the proposal that another be sought to take the place of the deposed queen. Accordingly they gather together the fairest maidens of all the provinces, and bring them to Shushan the palace (identical with the Susa of profane history). From this company the future queen was to be chosen.

There is some interesting data afforded by profane history on this point, to which we advert for a moment.

In the *third* year of Xerxes' reign, he made a feast to deliberate concerning the invasion of Greece. Four years later he returned discomfited to Susa, where he plunged into all kinds of pleasures and excesses to drive from his mind the bitter memories of his defeats. His favorite queen seems to have been chosen at this time, and her name is given as Amestris—which, it will be seen, bears a close relation to Esther. All this goes far to prove the contention that Xerxes is the great king here referred to. The name Ahasuerus presents no difficulty, as it is simply an imperial title, like Pharaoh, or Agag, which is said to mean, according to Sir Henry Rawlinson, "Venerable King." It is noteworthy that in Ezra iv. 6 Cambyses is called by this name, while in Dan. ix. 1 it is applied, in all probability, to Cyaxares. The fact that Amestris was reported to be cruel and bloodthirsty would not necessarily militate against this view; as it is most unlikely that the Persians would think of Esther in any other way, after the great slaughter which resulted when the enemies of the Jews were routed. She would naturally be blamed for the miscarriage of Haman's plan.

Returning to the Scripture narrative, charming

in its simplicity and straightforwardness, we are introduced in verse 5 to the stout-hearted Jew who is to figure so prominently in future chapters, as well as in verse 7, to his beautiful cousin Hadassah, or Esther.

"Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away" (vers. 5, 6).

The Hebrews, and many Christians, have gathered from this that Mordecai was a lineal descendant of Kish, the father of Israel's first king. Josephus so understood it, for he refers to Esther as being "herself of the royal family also" (Ant. vi. 1); and as she was cousin to Mordecai, both were necessarily of the same lineage. Kish was, however, a common Hebrew name, especially among the Benjamites; but standing here, as it does, for the father of a family, the presumption is certainly in favor of the above view. As we shall see farther on, there would appear to be a divine fitness in thus bringing forward at so crucial a period a member of the failed house of Saul. Had that rebellious and obstinate king (1 Sam. xv. 22, 23) faithfully performed the commandment of the Lord in regard to the

utter destruction of Amalek, the book of Esther would in all probability never have been written, as Israel would never have been exposed to the danger therein recorded. We shall see why, further on.

The name Mordecai is said to mean "Little man," and was probably given him for the lack of that which made Saul so much admired, namely, greatness of stature.

He must have been very young indeed when carried away to Babylon, as the captivity of Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, took place B. C. 599, something over eighty years ere our chapter opens. This aged patriarch "brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful: whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (ver. 7). She, by her grace and beauty, attracted the attention of the officers whose business it was to find a bride for the king, and she was given into the custody of the chamberlain Hegai. "And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the women" (ver. 9).

It was a strange position surely for a Jewish maiden to occupy, in marked contrast with Moses, in whom, however, she no doubt gloried. He, picked up as a waif, to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, by faith relinquished this high place, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." As one has remarked, "Providence had placed him in Pharaoh's house, but faith took him out of it." With Esther it was otherwise. There can be no question that her position was entirely opposed to the word of God. Providence might seem to favor her, but faith would assuredly have led her at once to declare herself as a despised Jewess, one of the afflicted people of Jehovah. This she does not do, Mordecai having expressly urged her to carefully conceal it. "Esther had not showed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not show it" (ver. 10). Faithful above many, Mordecai yet had not fully entered into God's mind in regard to the complete separation of His people from the nations. The law expressly forbade the giving of the daughters of Israel in marriage to the Gentiles; but it is very evident that both Mordecai and Esther thought they saw in the proposed union a means of blessing to their people. And so, indeed, it proved to be; but this

by no means disannulled or made of none effect the word of God.

In the same way people reason concerning much that goes on in our day. It is seldom that Christians are found who will refuse everything that is contrary to the Scriptures, even though it *seem* to be the means of accomplishing much good. But to walk in the truth is of more importance than busy activity.

Take the question of female ministry as an example. We have often been asked concerning the public ministry of women, "If not of God, how is it that He so frequently blesses it to the salvation of souls? Many women occupying the public platform as teachers and preachers are assuredly blessed of God: does He not therefore set the seal of His approval upon their position?" Admitting the premise, which may not always be before God as it appears to man, the conclusion by no means follows. Clearly and unmistakably the Holy Ghost has said, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Tim. ii. 12). And again, "Let your women keep silence in the churches (assemblies); for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands

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at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church" (I Cor. xiv. 34, 35). Then, solemnly, he adds in verse 37, "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." Here is the unerring word of God upon the subject. If that Word is violated, and still blessing results, what does it prove? That God has changed His mind, or ignores, and would have us ignore, His own Word? Ah, no! What then? Simply that He is sovereign, and uses His truth wherever proclaimed, and by whomsoever; but the judgment-seat of Christ will manifest all that was contrary to His mind.

We knew of a man saved in a Roman Catholic church while an ungodly priest, as his after-life proved, was reading the gospel for the day from Luke xv. Are we therefore to reason that the Roman priesthood is according to God because He sets the seal of blessing upon His Word used by one of them? Every unprejudiced mind will say, No! We give Him glory that, in spite of all the failure and disorder of Christendom, His love is so great that it breaks every barrier, and reaches men and women in their deep, deep need by any and all means whereby He can make Himself known; but we deprecate all disobedience to Him as sin.

This principle apprehended in the soul will save from much confusion of mind. Had Mordecai apprehended it, he would never have counseled his cousin as he did. The word of God was ignored. That He deigned to use the ignorers of it in blessing to His people was an act of pure grace.

In marked contrast with Esther's course is that of another Israelitish captive—the little maid of 2 Kings v, who waited upon Naaman's wife. Her sphere was much more circumscribed, but how faithfully she glorified God in it! "A word spoken in season, how good is it!" Such was her testimony to her heathen mistress, and so wonderfully did God own and bless it that it brought a proud Syrian captain to confess Israel's God as the only true God, whom alone he would henceforth serve. Oh for grace thus to buy up opportunities and to use them to His glory while ourselves walking in singleness of heart in the path marked out in the Scriptures of truth!

To return to Esther: Daily Mordecai walked before the court of the house of the women to learn if all was well with her. One after another, the maidens were presented to the king, each vying with the other in the effort to add to her natural charms by means of the sweet odors and other preparations given her. Esther—to her credit be it noted—disdained all these things,

save what were officially appointed, and when she was presented to the king, "the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti" (ver. 17). A signal honor, doubtless, but how low had she stooped to obtain it! How had she lost that character of holy separation to Jehovah which should ever have been hers! How truly was she degraded in her very exaltation! The favored wife among many, and her lord an uncircumcised Gentile! How low had the nation fallen when Mordecai, one of the noblest of them all, could rejoice in such a dubious honor being accorded her! And how low spiritually must the Church be, to seek, as she does, the patronage of the world! This can only be purchased by the loss of the holiness and separate character enjoined by the word of God. Such is the lesson we would seek to impress upon our reader's conscience. Far better had it been for Esther to have been poor and unknown, yet cleaving to the Lord her God among the returned captives at Jerusalem, than to be thus exalted in the house of the conqueror. And so to-day; far better to be little and despised in the eyes of a haughty world, and an equally haughty Christendom, while seeking to carry out the truth as to the Christian's heavenly calling,

than, through forgetting this, to be made much of by those "whose glory is in their shame; who mind earthly things." This is a snare against which the Lord's separated people need to be specially warned to-day. The word of Jehovah to Jeremiah should be often called to mind: "If thou return, then will I bring thee again, and thou shalt stand before Me: and if thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as My mouth: let them return unto thee; but return not thou unto them" (Jer. xv. 19).

The present is a time of great sweeping-away of the ancient landmarks. It is a day of marked indifference to evil—of chronic inability to try the things that differ. Let us not be carried away with the tide, but faithfully guard the treasure committed to us, and spurn the patronage of that which is so obnoxious to God.

The account of Esther's marriage-feast is but sorrowful reading if one be able to detect the sad departure from the Word which it indicates. "Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts according to the state of the king" (ver. 18). It would seem that Mordecai too was advanced to a position of trust; for in the next verse we learn that "when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate," which implies that

he became a petty judge, according to the Oriental manner of expressing it. One is reminded of "righteous Lot," who sat in the gate of Sodom; and of how many other dear children of God since, who have sought and obtained positions of power and influence in this poor "Christless world," hoping thereby to be used in its improvement, only to be bitterly disappointed at last, besides being degraded themselves.

Significantly, the next verse tells us again that "Esther had not showed her kindred nor her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him" (ver. 20).

This, no doubt, would be considered good policy on Mordecai's part, and lovely obedience in Esther, but it was real unfaithfulness to God, often duplicated in our own times. What a contrast with Ruth, the converted Moabitess! "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" is her bright confession. How much more honoring to the Lord than the shrewdness of Mordecai and Esther!

In the last three verses of our chapter an event is recorded which becomes of grave importance farther on in the book. "In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the thing was known

to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king" (vers. 21-23).

Although in an unscriptural position, God, who knows the heart of His servant, who sees in Mordecai and Esther true lovers of Israel, will use them signally for His own ends of good to His people, whom He truly loved. If they cover their nationality, and shame Him so that He hides His name too, He will make them nevertheless the instruments of His providence. Mordecai becomes the means by which a plot against the life of the king is thwarted. But for the present no notice is taken of him. The conspirators are hanged, the service of Mordecai is recorded in the records of the kingdom, but he himself is, apparently, forgotten. Such is the favor of this world! In a darker hour, however, One, in whose hand is a sleepless night of the king, shall see that the overlooked service shall be brought to the monarch's attention, and turn it to account for deliverance of that people for whose care His eyes never slumber.

It is of all importance that the saint should ever remember that "all things work together for good to them that love God, who are the called

according to His purpose." There may be times when God seems to have forgotten; when clouds are dark; when one is allowed to be neglected, unjustly treated, or coldly set at nought. But rest assured all is naked and open before Him with whom we have to do. Every purpose shall be manifested in its season; and all at last shall be cause for eternal thanksgivings.

CHAPTER III

THE WRATH OF THE AMALEKITE, AND THE DECREE OF DOOM

HAMAN is now brought upon the scene, who occupies a large place in the book, and who is execrated by all Hebrews to this day: "Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy," is his significant title. When his name is mentioned even now, orthodox Jews spit and curse him, so hateful is his memory.

"After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him" (ver. 1). Agag was the name given to the kings of Amalek, the people "against whom the Lord hath indignation forever." Haman, then, is a royal Amalekite—the last of his proud house to occupy a position of influence and power; for with his death, and that of his ten sons, the name of Amalek, according to Jehovah's word, is blotted out from under heaven.

In order to understand the reason for Mordecai's unyielding attitude in regard to Haman, it will be necessary to look into the history of this warlike and impious people.

In Gen. xxxvi. 12 we find the origin of Amalek, the progenitor of the tribe afterwards bearing his name. "And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz, Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek." See also 1 Chron. i. 36.

Amalek, then, sprang from Esau, which is Edom. Esau is ever a type of the flesh. Even ere the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob, they struggled together—picture of the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. Esau is the first-born, and then Jacob; for "that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. xv. 46).

This is again and again set forth in Scripture, the first-born being set aside to make room for one who might stand for or set forth the Second Man. Cain is set aside, and Abel, revived in Seth, is given the pre-eminent place. Ishmael must be cast out that Isaac be honored. Manasseh, too, gives way to Ephraim, as Joseph had been given the place of the first-born in preference to Reuben.

The author of the notes in the *Numerical Bible* has pointed out the close similarity in sound and meaning between Adam and Edom. Edom is but old Adam revived, and from him Amalek springs.

What, then, comes from the flesh? Only ungodly lusts and passions. Of these Amalek is the type. "Among whom we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh,

fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others" (Eph. ii. 3).

In Gen. xiv. 7 we first read of the land of the Amalekites, the valleys of southern Palestine, involved in the great conflicts of the Elamite ascendancy. Who the inhabitants were at that time we know not, but the land is called by the name of the war-like tribe who occupied it at the time Moses wrote the record.

It is when next mentioned that we see their true character. In the seventeenth chapter of Exodus they appear as the first of Israel's foes, and they proved a most persistent enemy ever after. God had but recently delivered His people from the cruel Egyptian oppressor. Sheltered by blood, they had eaten the passover with holy confidence while the Lord judged the gods of Egypt and smote the first-born of those who despised His word. Redeemed by power, they had been led in triumph through the Red Sea, and on the eastern shore they sang their song of gladness as they beheld the power of the enemy broken, and knew that they were Jehovah's purchased people. He took them under His own care, and made Himself responsible for all their needs. The waters of Marah He sweetened, and refreshed them beneath Elim's shade. He gave them bread from heaven, and quails when they asked for flesh.

But they failed to realize who it was with whom they had to do. When they pitched in Rephidim, "there was no water for the people to drink." They murmured against Moses, and charged him with having brought them out to slay them with thirst. But God, ever acting in pure grace, until, in their self-confidence, they put themselves under law, said unto Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thy hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel" (Ex. xvii. 5, 6).

A lovely picture, surely, and easily understood in the light of two New Testament Scriptures. "That Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. x. 4). "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. . . . But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John vii, 37, 39). The cross had to come in ere He could be glorified as man. That blessed Rock had to be smitten with the rod of judgment before the Holy Spirit could come to satisfy and fill all who would drink. Of this it is that mystic scene at Horeb speaks. Israel in type are drinking of the living

waters. Surely their troubles are over now forever! Ah, it *should* have been; but, alas, it was not so. It is at this moment that we read, "Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim." And so the lusts of the flesh would ever hinder the believer's enjoyment of the refreshing influences of the Holy Spirit. The Christian is beset by a tireless and hateful foe who makes it his business to defraud him, if possible, of the blessing that is rightfully his.

It is to this the word in Gal. v. 16, 17 refers: "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye might not (literal rendering) do the things that ye would."

How will the saint thus beset find deliverance and victory? Only by mortifying his members that are upon the earth. But this he cannot do in his own power. And so Moses says to Joshua, "Choose us out men, and go out, and fight with Amalek: to-morrow I will stand on the top of the hill, with the rod of God in my hand." Beautiful picture, surely, of our great Intercessor above, "who ever liveth to make intercession for us." Aaron and Hur had to hold up the hands of Moses, but our blessed Lord needs none to thus assist Him. His advocacy is ever going on. His intercessions

for His saints are unfailing, and He is thus able to save evermore all who come unto God by Him. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4).

It was on this first occasion of Amalek's hatred and attack against His people that "the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: for he said, Because of the hand upon the throne of Jah, Jehovah will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. xvii. 14-16—marginal reading). This was Amalek's awful sin. He would, if possible, tear Jehovah from His throne, and usurp His authority. So would the fleshly lusts, which war against the soul, dethrone the Holy One and reign in His stead.

In Num. xiv. 44, 45 Israel disobeyed the word of the Lord, and *presumed* to go up unto the hill-top in their own strength to meet their foes. "Then the Amalekites came down . . . and discomfited them, even unto Hormah." The moment a saint gets out of God's order he exposes himself to the power of the flesh. There is no safety save in obedience to the Word.

Balaam foretells the doom of this haughty foe in Num. xxiv. 20. "When he looked on Amalek,

he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish forever." Moses too, in his last charge to the people, says, "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee" (it is ever such who are a prey to the lusts of the flesh), "when thou wast weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be . . . that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; THOU SHALT NOT FORGET IT" (Deut. xxv. 17-19).

We will not refer at any length to the woes brought upon Israel by Amalek in the days of the Judges, only bidding the reader notice that whenever the people rose up in the energy of faith and the lowliness of self-judgment, all Amalek's power was broken. It will be a profitable exercise to read at leisure and carefully study Judges v., vi., and x, on this subject.

In connection with the commission given to king Saul at the mouth of Samuel, in 1 Sam. xv, we get the inspired account of God's command and Saul's failure to carry it out. It is most instructive, as well as of special interest, in connection with our study of the book of Esther. Saul was commanded to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not."

But, alas, though the young king gained a won-

derful victory, and "utterly destroyed all the *people* with the edge of the sword," he spared Agag; and Haman is witness that he likewise failed to exterminate the rest of the royal family. Had Saul been true to God, and yielded implicit obedience to His Word, Haman could never have appeared on the scene. Saul's unfaithfulness made the plot of "the Jew's enemy" possible, and exposed the chosen nation to destruction. What a triumph for Satan it would have been if, in place of Amalek's "utter destruction," Israel had been rooted out from among the nations!

There is a solemn lesson here. Sin unjudged, evil propensities unmortified, will result in grave trouble later. Is the reader conscious of indulging some fleshly desire—something, perhaps, that it seems hard to put to death, so dear is it to him, and, withal, so insignificant? Rest assured, it will be the cause of serious disaster if unjudged. It may go on unnoticed for years, but the day will come when it, like Haman, will rise in its power; and well it shall be then if it be not the cause of moral and spiritual shipwreck. Is it a young believer who sees these lines? Remember the word of the Holy Spirit to Timothy, "Flee also youthful lusts." Any unholy desire tolerated in the soul must work eventually to the undoing of your discipleship, to the breaking-down of your testimony.

Samuel showed Agag no mercy; but some of his children—perhaps only one, and that one, mayhap, a weak and puny infant—escaped him; and behold, nearly six hundred years later, a royal Amalekite and a descendant of the house of Kish, the father of king Saul, confront each other!

Haman is advanced before all the princes, for well the flesh knows how to work its way to the front. All fall down before him and own his authority, save one unyielding old man, insignificant in stature and unknown among the great. "And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence" (ver. 2).

Never was Mordecai's moral elevation higher than at this moment. He is no longer the crafty, politic man of chapter two. He shines forth as a man who takes his stand upon the word of the Eternal, let the consequences be what they may. There is no longer a tendency to hide his people and his kindred. He lets all know that he is a Jew. As such he cannot bow to the blatant enemy of Jehovah. The Lord hath indignation against Amalek. So also, in substance, says Mordecai. He sides with God. From now on he is a character delightful to contemplate.

"Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why trans-

gressest thou the king's commandment?" (ver. 3). To them it seems the essence of foolhardiness and stubbornness. We read not of any other, even of his own nation, so unyielding as he. Why not, at least, incline his head? Why not go with the crowd? Why make himself so unpleasantly conspicuous by his peculiar obstinacy? Better men than he, perhaps, bowed to Haman, the king's prime minister. Why should he be too narrow-minded to do so? To all this Mordecai might have replied, God has spoken. He declares He will have indignation against Amalek forever. I side with Him. It matters not what others do, I have to go by what I find written in the book.

"Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he harkened not unto them, that they told Haman, *to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew*" (ver. 4). There is no evasion now: all is out at last. The judge in the king's gate is one of the despised captives, and he will risk the loss of name and station, yea, of life itself, rather than be unfaithful to the truth of God.

The king's servants desire to see if Mordecai's matters will *stand*. Of course they will stand, for does not he stand with and for God, who "is able to make him stand?" None ever falls who acts for God. His power is over all. He may permit testing and trial, but "whatsoever is born of God

overcometh the world." He is in the right who sides with God.

When Haman hears of the slight thus put upon him, he is "full of wrath." He must have his revenge on the impudent Jew who thus refuses to acknowledge his prestige: but "he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai" (vers. 5, 6). What a mess had the obstinate little Jew made of it all now! If he must have such strong convictions, why could he not keep them to himself, and, by getting out of Haman's way, refrain from making himself and all his people obnoxious to him? Could not he conform to the customs of the times? Did he not know that things were different now from what they were in the days of Moses, of the Judges, and of Samuel? Is not this the way men reason to-day? And, doubtless, many so reasoned in the times of Mordecai: but to all he could have given the triumphant answer, It is my place to obey God, and to honor His Word. I leave all consequences with Him.

This is what characterizes ever the man of God in all dispensations. It was this spirit that sustained Noah in testimony against a corrupt, sin-loving world as he built his great ship on dry land.

In this energy of faith Moses forsook Egypt; Caleb cried, "We are well able to overcome"; Gideon went forth to war with lamps and pitchers; David fought an armored giant with a shepherd's sling and stones; Jehoshaphat set singers in the van of his army where others would have set mounted troops; Daniel opened his windows to pray to the God of heaven; and Paul lived his life of devotion to the crucified, exalted Lord, and refused to conform to the demands of the men of his day and age. In this spirit, too, of subjection to revealed truth, Athanasius suffered banishment rather than bow to the Arianism of the times; Savonarola defied the licentious, gold-hoarding officials of church and state; Luther uttered his mighty *"No!"* in the presence of the emperor, the bishops and grandees of the empire; Farel tossed venerated images into the river in the midst of furious priests and populace; Knox caused a queen to tremble; and the Covenanters chose rather to be hunted as the beasts of the field than own the spiritual authority of degenerate kings and bishops; and a mighty host, "of whom the world was not worthy," refused to bow the knee or bend the neck to unscriptural, superstitious, and human legislation, making of none effect the word of God.

Men of this stamp are certain to be dubbed by the time-serving trucklers to the present age as schismatics, separatists, and what not. But let

such be content to know that *God* is pleased, and they fear not the frown, and court not the approval, of flesh and blood.

Haman's colossal scheme for the annihilation of the Jewish race is worthy of its great instigator, that old serpent, which is the devil and Satan. The proud Agagite was but a mere puppet in his hands. Haman desired to obtain revenge for the slight put upon his dignity: the devil sought to make void the promises of God. The awful foe of God and man knew well that Jehovah had declared that from David's house should arise the One who was to bruise his head—One who is to "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver those who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." That nation destroyed, the promised Deliverer could not appear, and the word of God would be rendered null and void. Again and again had he sought to accomplish this. When the hand of Saul threw the javelin at the youthful David, it was Satan who inspired it, but God who protected the minstrel from the blow, that he might live to be the conservator of the promise. When the wicked queen Athaliah sought to destroy all the seed royal, it was the devil who put the awful thought in her mind, but God who nourished the infant Joash in the temple courts.

And so it was the same foul spirit now who

would sacrifice a nation to prevent the Redeemer's advent; as in the day when that long-predicted event had actually occurred, he sought, through Herod, to destroy Him in His infancy by slaying the babes of Bethlehem, only to be outwitted once more; for God directed His Son to a distant land.

Some idea of Haman's wealth and influence can be gained from the intimacy manifested betwixt him and the king in verses 8 to 11, as also the immense amount of silver he offered for the accomplishment of his cherished plans: ten thousand talents in that age having about the value of twenty millions of dollars now.

His superstition too is evidenced in verse 7. Like many a tyrant before, and since, he was a great believer in lucky and unlucky days; so he had the wise men—the traffickers in the credulity of ambitious courtiers—to cast lots, called in Hebrew *Pur,* to determine a suited day when all signs would be propitious for the carrying out of his colossal massacre. Armed with what he considered to be the favor of the gods (for it is unlikely that he, like the Persians, was a monotheist), he entered the king's presence, and, affecting concern for the interests of the state, he says, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from

all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them." And, as though in a burst of magnanimity, he offers to pay ten thousand talents of silver to rid the king of subjects so objectionable. Carelessly, without so much as inquiring the name of the race referred to, Ahasuerus, with that disregard of human life so common in Xerxes, "took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy," saying, as he did so, "The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee" (vers. 8-11).

Acting on this, Haman loses no time, but immediately summons the king's scribes, and issues a proclamation, sealed with the king's ring, to be "sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar" (the date determined by the lot), "and to take the spoil of the people for a prey" (ver. 13). Thus had the entire nation been devoted to destruction, and under the unalterable laws of the Medes and Persians—the same laws that left Vashti still a lonely widow, and which would brook of no reversal.

To every people the news went forth, urging them to be ready against that day. "And the

King and Haman," as though the massacre of myriads had not just been planned and sealed, "sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed" (ver. 15).

CHAPTER IV

IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES

"WHEN Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry; and came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was a great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (vers. 1-3).

In such solemn manner was the decree received by the condemned Jews. To Haman, and to the king, the slaughter of a nation for the gratification of a prince's vanity might be a thing indifferent; but to the people thus devoted, it was the cause of heartrending scenes. They *believed* the word of Ahasuerus. The proclamation was sealed with the royal signet. They *knew* they were under sentence of death, and their hearts were filled with grief and anguish. In this, how like the condition of awakened sinners! All unsaved men are under a

far worse condemnation than that which darkened the sky of every Jew in the Persian dominions. Yea, more: because "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" that condemnation is, unlike the present instance, an intrinsically righteous one. Every honest man must side with the dying robber on the cross, and confess, "We indeed justly!" "Death passed upon all men, *because* all have sinned." Therefore "it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment."

If this be really true, how is it that men and women in general are so indifferent to the solemn fact? Alas, alas! though God has given His Word, men will not believe it. Wherever that Word *is* believed the result is prostration of soul before the offended Majesty in the heavens, as in the case of the repentant publican, who cried from the depths of an anguished heart, "O God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" It is because men do not believe God they can go on so carelessly with the dark clouds of doom gathering ever in greater density directly over their heads.

Is my reader one of this class? If so, I pray you, receive the testimony of God against yourself ere the judgment falls. You have grievously sinned, and righteously fallen under the ban of the Holy One. He has published broadcast the proclamation, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book

of the law to do them." You have *not* so continued. Therefore you are under the curse! Do not, I beg of you, try to forget it. How foolish would it have been for the Jews in the days of Esther to have instituted a series of games and popular amusements in order to banish from their minds the awful fact that their death-warrant had been signed, and was about to be put into execution! In such manner did the citizens of infidel Paris act in the days of the plague. Dancing, revelling and debauchery held full sway. The gay carnival went on as though all was well; but it was only the effort of a terror-stricken people to forget the presence of the dreaded and insidious foe. Hundreds fell, stricken on the ball-room floor; hundreds more dropped, grotesquely masked, amid the gayety of the romping crowds upon the streets. The fun and the forced merriment did not stay the hand of the destroyer; the death-cart ever followed the carnival parade! And in some such foolish manner do men, over whose heads eternal judgment hangs, act every day. Oh, the folly of it! Better far to join with Mordecai and his weeping countrymen, and wear the sackcloth and ashes of self-condemnation.

"No room for mirth or trifling here,
For worldly hope or worldly fear,
If life so soon is gone:
If now the Judge is at the door,

And all mankind must stand before
The inexorable Throne!"

"Because there is wrath, beware lest He take thee away with His stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee" (Job xxxvi. 18).

There was no levity on the part of the wailing multitude in our chapter. They were in desperate earnestness. They wished to be delivered from the condemnation. Nothing else would satisfy them. Sackcloth and ashes speak of repentance and self-judgment. In this garb Mordecai and the Jews arrayed themselves.

"So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not" (ver. 4). How little Esther entered into the terrible circumstances! "A physician of no value," she would fain strip her aged cousin of the coarse and ugly garb of repentance and robe him in some beautiful court attire, as though a change of clothing would assuage his grief. But are there not many who deal in a similar manner with troubled souls to-day? How common is the thought that outward reformation, a change of habits, will give peace to an anxious soul! O be persuaded, dear reader: no religious ceremonies; no ordinances, however scriptural in themselves; no turning-over of new leaves will ever give a

sinner peace with God. Something more than an outward change is required. Mordecai might well have cried, Take away your beautiful garments! How can they give peace to a man under the death-sentence? Does one find delight in fine raiment on the gallows? It is deliverance from condemnation I want, not a mere change of attire. And for the sinner to-day there is no true deliverance until he sees the blessed truth that Another has borne the wrath, endured the condemnation, exhausted the judgment of God against his sin,—then, and then only, does he find rest and peace.

"Mordecai received it not;" so the queen, realizing at last that his must be a grief she has failed to fathom, sends Hatach the chamberlain to him, to learn the cause of his strange behavior. "So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave a copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai" (vers. 6-9).

Nothing but the knowledge that he and his people are freed from the ban will satisfy the man into whose soul the iron has so deeply entered. Esther is furnished with the evidence of the direful state of things, and doubtless well understands at last why Mordecai wept so bitterly, and why her fine raiment had no charm for him.

He would have her go in before the king and supplicate his favor for her afflicted people. She is, however, in a dilemma as to this, being herself, although a queen, subject to the iron-clad laws of Persian court etiquette. Doubtless genuinely distressed, but apparently helpless, she returns answer that "All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live; but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told to Mordecai Esther's words" (vers. 11, 12).

It has evidently not dawned upon her that the king's proclamation, unwittingly, had included herself. But so the word ran: "All Jews . . . both men and women." She had kept her nationality a secret; therefore, unknown even to Haman, she had been included in the bloody edict so soon to take effect if a means of deliverance is not discov-

ered. She accordingly hesitates about risking her life, by going into the dread sovereign's presence uncalled.

Mordecai replies with spirit: "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews." Yet, such is his faith at this moment in the certainty of God's counsels that he adds, "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

It is a stirring message, and one that has the desired effect upon the queen, for she rises in the greatness of utter self-abnegation and devotion; and, with the sentence of death now in herself, "Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer: Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and *if I perish, I perish*" (vers. 15, 16).

A greater than Esther not only took His life in His hand, but gave that precious life in order to deliver all who would confide in Him from the curse of the law and the just judgment of an outraged God. But though Esther's action gives

us just the faintest hint of this, it is altogether admirable as showing on her part a growing moral elevation, hitherto unmanifested by her. That her confidence is in the unnamed One is clear, else why the summons to fasting in the city, and her own abstinence in the palace? It is here one is so struck by the absence of all reference to prayer, where one would naturally expect it. It is as though she has a sense in her soul of the unowned condition of herself and her people; so nothing is said about crying to the God of her fathers. Yet surely He heard the unuttered petition of the heart, and answered it, too, in His own way and time.

"So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him." The appeal is to be made to the One they dare not mention. The sequel will show how deep is His concern for the chosen nation.

CHAPTER V

THE SCEPTRE OF GRACE, THE BANQUET, AND THE GALLOWS.

THE days of fasting past, the queen ventures into the forbidden presence. "Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house" (ver. 1). The die is cast. The queen has practically forfeited her life in order to save her people. If the king give it back to her it shall be well. She and all hers will see in it the evidence of his grace. If not, she can but die, and for that she is prepared.

Her youth and beauty, as well as her confiding trust, draw out her lord's admiration. "And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre" (ver. 2).

Grace is reigning! Of this the sceptre of gold speaks. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whither-

soever He will" (Prov. xxi. 1). He it is who has inclined the proud ruler of the Medes and Persians to extend the token of his favor to his trembling queen. "The most high God ruleth in the kingdom of men" (Dan. iv. 25), whether they recognize Him or not, and all power is in His hand. He has heard the mute prayer of Esther and her people, and from henceforth we are to see how He worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, despite every effort of the enemy to thwart His purpose.

"His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower."

Knowing that nought but some special guerdon desired could have brought his favorite wife thus unannounced and unsent for into the throne room, the king said unto her, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? It shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom" (ver. 3). It is as if a blank check signed were handed her, reminding us of the many precious assurances of the New Testament: "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus," for "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." He, who is neither enriched by withholding nor impover-

ished by giving, says to each trusting soul, "What is thy request?" And Omnipotence waits upon the petitions of His feeble people; and to faith He says: "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." May we have faith to thus enter into and enjoy His wondrous bounty.

Esther is not slow to proffer her request, though at first sight it seems a little thing indeed. "And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him" (ver. 4).

There is nothing that so emboldens a soul, burdened with anxiety, and desirous of obtaining help from another, like a season of communion and fellowship. Such a season Esther desires as a prelude to making known her real burden. As though to cover all suspicion, Haman, whose presence must have jarred terribly at such a time, is invited with the king. "So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared" (ver. 5).

In the house of wine the king affirms again his promise to his beloved queen: "And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed." It is, in its measure, like the word of the Lord to "His own" at the "banquet of wine" in John xiv. 13, 14, after the traitor had

gone out: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My name I will do it." The king puts a limit: "even to the half of the kingdom." Our blessed Lord puts a limit too: "in My name"—whatever His holy name may rightly be attached to. This is the only bound He will put to our asking. This, doubtless, is the secret of many unanswered prayers. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (Jas. iv. 3). Such prayer cannot have the name of the Lord Jesus attached to it. The expression really means, by His authority. One says to another, "Do so and so in my name." All understand he means as representing, or having the authority of the speaker behind him. And so it is in approaching the God of all grace in prayer. There is holy confidence when the will has been so truly subdued that the heart's only desire is that the Lord may be glorified. Then one can ask "in His name," and He has pledged His Word to do it.

We do not profess to say that queen Esther's case is any parallel to this. It but gives us the hint: and we turn aside from the narrative to press it upon the reader's attention. because of the great importance of the subject.

True prayer is perhaps much rarer than many have any idea of. It can only spring from fel-

lowship with God in a practical sense. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you, *ye shall ask what ye will,* and it shall be done unto you" (John xv. 7). It is for lack of this that the prayer-meeting, and the daily season of reading and prayer in the home—not to speak of the sacred moments which should be spent in the closet with closed doors—often degenerate into a mere lifeless form. Souls are conscious of some secret sin indulged; some unscriptural thing in business or family life being persisted in; and of course there cannot be real prayer as long as this is the case. One has no title to expect an answer from God if walking in any forbidden path. May this be deeply impressed upon our souls!

It has been sometimes said that "the prayer-meeting is the pulse of the assembly," and we believe the expression to be a correct one. A sluggish, lifeless prayer-meeting is the indication that, whatever the activity otherwise, things are in a very low state indeed. It is quite possible to carry on gospel and teaching meetings, and to preserve a certain amount of order and decorum at the table of the Lord, which deceives many into the belief that the Holy Spirit is leading; but it is *not* possible truly to pray out of fellowship with God. This is especially true of the secret place. Even in the meeting set apart for waiting on God, a loquacious, self-confident man may be able to deceive himself

and others into the impression that his is really the prayer of faith; but a few moments spent in the presence of God, alone, will show how things really stand. There is no liberty, no power; all is a weariness to the flesh if the will is not truly subject, and the supreme desire of the soul not expressed in the words, "Thy will be done."

But we return to our narrative. It would appear that Esther has not yet that liberty that would lead her to plead her case with assurance; so to the king's question she replies, "My petition and my request is, if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to-morrow as the king hath said" (vers. 7, 8). To this he evidently agrees; but what momentous consequences would hang upon that twenty-four hours' delay! Satan, knowing that his time is short, and realizing that if his unholy purpose is to be carried out something must at once be done, contrives to bring about if possible the death of Mordecai at least, ere Esther has the appointed opportunity to ask his life with the rest.

"Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against

Mordecai" (ver. 9). The apparently triumphant Amalekite emerges in greater hauteur than ever from the banqueting house. His cup of earthly glory seems filled to the brim. Who so honored as he? He, alone of all the king's favorites, had been admitted to the queen's presence. But there is one bitter ingredient in that so full goblet. Mordecai, the sackcloth-covered Jew, pays him no attention, whatever, as he passes by. The flesh cannot brook being thus despised. He is deeply grieved and filled with wrath against the only man who failed to do him honor. "Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife, and Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king" (vers. 10, 11). What a disgusting exhibition of vanity and pride! Surely Haman is now "set in slippery places." Even the heathen, noting how soon, in the moral government of the universe, disaster followed on unbounded self-sufficiency and inordinate self-esteem, had coined the proverb, "Whom the gods would destroy they first make mad." And the one true God had, long ere Haman's day, inspired a man to write, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;" and "when pride cometh, then cometh shame:

but with the lowly is wisdom" (Prov. xvi. 18 and xi. 2).

With characteristic conceit the vainglorious premier keeps what he considers the choicest morsel to the last. "Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." But he cannot conceal his wounded vanity in connection with the incident at the gate, for he adds bitterly, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (vers. 12, 13).

In the eyes of his satellites and his equally proud and vindictive wife, this is a matter that can readily be disposed of. Why should he wait the appointed time for the destruction of Mordecai with the rest of the Jews? Has he not just shown that none have such influence with the king as he? Why not, on some trumped-up pretext, despatch the insolent Hebrew at once? "Then said Zeresh his wife, and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and to-morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made" (ver. 14).

Fifty cubits would be about eighty feet: rather unduly high, one would think, for one insignificant,

undersized Jew to swing from; but Haman will publish his revenge abroad and thus give an object-lesson to any other who would dare defy the man of the hour.

And so our chapter closes, with the last nails being driven in the gallows in Haman's court, while Mordecai is all unaware of the fate which is purposed to be meted out to him on the morrow; and a score of hours have yet to run ere the queen will prefer her request before the king.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

CHAPTER VI

A SLEEPLESS NIGHT, AND ITS RESULTS

IT has been well said that "although the *name* of God is not in this book, the *hand* of God is plainly to be seen throughout." Nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in the present chapter, every verse of which attests His overruling providence and His unfailing love and care for His people, in a wrong place though they were. He is behind the scenes, it is true; but, to use the expression of another, He moves all the scenes that He is behind.

It is not until the last night that He interferes:

"God never is before His time,
And never is behind."

To all appearances, Satan was to have everything his own way, at least so far as Mordecai was concerned. In Haman's tessellated courtyard the now completed gallows stands fifty cubits high. The lofty Amalekite is already gloating over the death of the unyielding descendant of Kish, and tosses restlessly upon his couch as he waits for the first glimmer of the morning for the execution of his wrath. He is not, however, the only restless one, for "on that night could not the king sleep."

In itself this was apparently a very trifling thing. How many a crowned head before and since has turned uneasily on its pillow and courted slumber in vain! But in this case, how much that sleepless night was to mean to Mordecai, and all his condemned brethren!

In his insomnia, the king, at last despairing of natural rest, called for "the strangest soporific ever sought." "He commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king" (ver. 1). Surely in those bloodstained annals there was enough to have driven away sleep forever. But One is overruling all, and the august Iranian emperor is but as a chess-king in His hand to be moved by Him at will.

As the records of his reign are read aloud in his hearing, "it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hands on Ahasuerus" (ver. 2). How well had all been timed! He who knows the end from the beginning had caused this service to be here recorded. He had also so ordered it that, at the time it was rendered, the preoccupied monarch should overlook entirely the one to whose faithfulness he owed his life. To Mordecai this may have seemed at the time like base ingratitude, though we read of no word of complaint. Possibly he had learned to "endure as seeing Him who is invisible." At any

rate it was now made manifest that there was a divine reason for the king's forgetfulness. God had timed everything well, and He "makes everything beautiful in its season."

Do these pages meet the eyes of some tried and discouraged saint? Have you been overwhelmed at times by a nameless dread as though God had utterly forgotten you, and you were cast off forever? Have you wearied yourself devising one human expedient after another, in the vain hope of averting threatened disaster by the arm of flesh? Learn, then, from God's dealings with His servant of old that His heart and hand are for you still. And "if God be for us, who can be against us?" He has heard every sigh; noted, and stored in His bottle, every tear; taken account of every cry of anguish; heard every confiding prayer. His arm is in nowise shortened; His ear is in no sense deaf to your cry. At the appointed time He will awake in your behalf, and you shall know that it is "the God of all grace" with whom you have to do. Only look up: be not cast down, for you are ever on His heart; and if you just leave all with Him, He will make your affairs His care. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." How sweet the words! **He** careth. He, the most high God: yea, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ **careth**. He is no indifferent spectator—no callous, unconcerned looker-on; but, as no one else can, He

careth for you. Assured of this, may not the reader and the writer well cry, "I will trust, and not be afraid"?

The hitherto neglectful king is at once aroused as his memory is refreshed in regard to Mordecai's service in days gone by. "And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him" (ver. 3). He had shown himself to be a loyal and faithful subject, despite the fact that he was of the children of the captivity; but though the king had profited by his devotion, he allowed him to go utterly unrewarded, while bestowing favors with lavish hand on so worthless a character as the selfish and despicable Haman. Such is the favor of princes. "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and *shall not see when good cometh;* but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green, and *shall not be careful in time of drought,* neither shall cease from yielding fruit" (Jer. xvii. 5-8). How sharp the contrast between the time-

serving man of the flesh, whose eyes are fixed on man for his reward—doomed ever to disappointment—and the God-fearing man of faith, who rises above all creature-help to the Most High Himself! Mordecai has left all in His hands. He is now about to make his way prosperous.

And yet even at the last moment how active is Satan in his efforts to thwart God's purpose of grace! At this moment a step is heard in the outer court of the royal sleeping apartment. "And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in" (vers. 4, 5).

If God is at work, so is the great adversary. Haman, still burning with wounded vanity, is early on the scene. He would forestall all further slights from Mordecai by getting the easily-influenced and luxurious despot to sign the order for the Jew's execution as soon as he shall rise. Then, the hated object out of the way, he will be in good humor for the festal board. He is, however, but to learn that "those who walk in pride, God is able to abase." He has reached the highest pinnacle of earthly glory to which he can lawfully

aspire. He is about to be hurled into the lowest depths of shame and ignominy.

The king's first words fairly cause his head to swim with wild exultation, and seem to point to the early fulfilment of his most cherished dreams. "What," asks his royal master, "shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" It is hardly to be wondered at that the vainglorious prince whose only concern was the advancement of his own interests "thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to MYSELF?" What a place that same "myself" had in this conceited, wretched man's mind! And what a snare is self-occupation, in any form, to the saint of God! Pride is distinctly said to be the cause of Satan's fall. "Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground" (Ezek. xxviii. 17). And when giving instruction concerning overseers in the house of God, in the New Testament, the Holy Ghost says, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim. iii. 6).

When we see pride in another, how hateful a thing it is! Haman is the very incarnation of it; and how we loathe so despicable a character! Yet, alas, how readily we tolerate in ourselves

what is so detestable in others. "The proud He knoweth afar off," but "the meek will He guide in judgment; the meek will He teach His way."

Filled with a sense of his own self-importance, Haman replies to the king's question in the boldest manner. He would have the man whom the king delights to honor appear before men as king himself in all but name. That, too, might come later if the populace but grew used to him appearing in royal garb, and the king's most noble princes were made to have a due sense of his power and ability. How plainly the Amalekite shows himself! The hand which of old was upon the throne of Jah is now stretched out to grasp the throne of the world! "And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor" (vers. 7-9). Could human pretension and ingenuity go farther? Intending all this for himself, can there be any doubt regarding his desire to have the people behold him

in all the outward trappings of royalty, in order to accustom their minds to a future usurpation of imperial power?

Did the king begin to see beneath the surface? Did he already commence to mistrust his favorite? Or is it only in our imagination that we see a touch of genuine irony, meant to cut to the very quick, in the brief and pithy command, "Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." Did the royal eye detect the way the color came and went in Haman's face? Did it note the downcast countenance and the disappointment too deep for words that marked him as he turned away without reply? We do not know. But the readiness with which the erstwhile favorite is given up to a richly deserved judgment later in the day, would imply a lack of confidence already cherished in his heart.

"Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor" (ver. 11). A terrible come-down, surely, and a remarkable turn of events! No wonder that we read, "And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered"

(ver. 12). Did Mordecai see in this sudden transition from ignominy to honor the pledge of his deliverance from condemnation? It would seem so, for he made no effort to resist the changing of his attire on this occasion. Haman too reads a lesson in it all, and in shame and confusion of face hurries from the public gaze to the seclusion of his own house. He knows it is in vain now for him to seek permission to hang Mordecai. The gallows stand like a monument to folly and vanity, still towering up to heaven, casting a shadow that speaks of approaching disaster.

"And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him" (ver. 13). Little comfort indeed does he find in this, which is all too true, as the sequel shows.

"And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared." His enthusiasm is greatly dampened. He would, without question, prefer retirement until he has regained his accustomed poise and self-confidence, but the king's command must be obeyed. Yesterday he would have needed no chamberlains to summon him. To-day all is changed. Already

he has been greatly humbled. Ere the remaining hours of light pass he shall have more crushing experiences still, and shall prove to the full the truth of the ominous prophecy of his wife and friends.

CHAPTER VII

THE SECOND BANQUET AND THE AMALEKITE'S END

IT is hardly to be supposed that the remarkable happenings of the forenoon had all taken place without Esther's knowledge. We know that she was in daily communication, through her chamberlains, with her aged cousin; and there can scarcely be any question as to her having been made familiar with his sudden elevation to the imperial favor. This would account for the lack of hesitancy and the implicit confidence with which she prefers her request when "the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen" (ver. 1).

The feast was not yet concluded when the king said, "What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom" (ver. 2). It is the same invitation to ask largely with the same assurance, as on the previous occasion, that all shall be given. "In the word of a king there is power." How much more to be relied on is the word of "God that cannot lie," who has said, "Everyone that asketh, receiveth;" and who invites implicit confidence, on

the part of His own blood-washed and redeemed saints, in His faithful promises.

"Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage" (vers. 3, 4). Knowing that her lord's favor is toward her, she pleads both her own cause, and her people's. She petitions him to spare their and her life.

How surprised must the king have been to hear her so speak. Who would dare seek the life of his beloved queen? And who could her people be who were thus placed in jeopardy of their lives? It is to be remembered that Esther's kindred had not yet been made known to the king. He was in ignorance of the fact that she was a Jewess.

Her words must have deeply agitated the already toppling son of Hammedatha. Was there not even a designed coincidence on her part between the decree drawn up by Haman and the queen's words as she said, "We are sold, I and my people, *to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish?*" How could he forget that such had been the language he had caused the king's scribes to write? What an appall-

ing discovery to learn that he had included the wife of Ahasuerus in his bold scheme of bloodshed and revenge! How earnestly he would listen for the king's reply.

"Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" (ver. 5). He at once makes her enemy his; and demands the name of the infamous wretch who could dare conceive so fearful a plot. The guilty conspirator reclines but a few feet from him. His sin is to find him out at last!

"And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and queen" (ver. 6). He is manifested now in his true character. The fawning and politic courtier appears as the deep-dyed villain whose perfidy is almost too great to be believed. Satan has again been foiled in his attempt to destroy the line of promise, and God has once more vindicated His Word.

It is easy to cherish a feeling of contempt and disgust for so low and vile a character as Haman. But it is well to remember, that in every man's heart is found the same evil thing, which when brought to its full fruition, appears so abominable in the ungodly Agagite. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked," and God asks the question, "Who can know it?"

He solemnly answers Himself: "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. xvii. 9, 10). It is "out of the heart," says the Lord Jesus, that all kinds of evil things proceed, and He names "evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. xv. 19). "These are the things which defile a man," He adds; and we desire affectionately to remind the reader, lest any should be in danger of forgetting it, that it is the grace of God alone which makes one man to differ from another.

No amount of education or culture, nay, nor self-restraint or religiousness, will eradicate the evil. It is the *nature* that is wholly and utterly corrupt and pernicious. Therefore before one can please God there must be a new nature imparted, and this is the result of new birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Nothing but this second birth, through receiving the word of God, will avail to place any natural man on a different footing before the throne of the Majesty on high, than that occupied by the Hamans, the Pharaohs, and the Herods of the Bible. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

People often consider it a mark of superior

virtue to be shocked and horrified by the crimes of others whom they imagine to be worse than themselves. It is well to realize that the worst acts of the worst men all spring from a nature identical with that of all other sons and daughters of Adam. It is because of this humbling fact our Lord had to tell a religious doctor that "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God," and again, "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again."

Is my reader certain that he or she is the subject of this great change? Have you truly turned to the Lord for yourself, and from the heart believed the gospel-message which declares that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners?" If not, I beseech you, read no further, but stop right here and consider, until you have, as a guilty, helpless sinner, cast yourself unreservedly upon that blessed One, "who died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 15).

If truly a Christian, turn with us once more to our narrative. The poor discovered wretch trembles before the king and the queen; as some day men will tremble before the Omnipotent Judge when all their secret guilt shall be made known before an assembled universe and it will be too late to seek a hiding-place.

It would seem that Ahasuerus is dazed for the moment, as he begins to realize what Haman had obtained his royal consent for. He is, in a very grave sense, a party to the proposed indiscriminate slaughter of the Hebrews, which would include his beloved spouse. We are told that "the king arising from the banquet of wine went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king" (ver. 7). The man who without a twinge of remorse could devote a nation to destruction, is in dire distress at the thought of himself losing life or liberty. He takes the place of suppliant at the feet of the now triumphant Esther, cousin to the unbending old man he had led through the streets in the morning. One is reminded of the word to Philadelphia, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (Rev. iii. 9, last clause).

In his desperation Haman oversteps the bounds of both court etiquette and ordinary decency, by throwing himself upon the divan where the queen was reclining. At this juncture "the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed where Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the words went out of the king's mouth they

covered Haman's face" (ver. 8). His very importunity, unwise in the extreme, is the means of his complete undoing. At a signal from the outraged monarch his face is covered—token of his condemnation to death. Hope is gone. He shall never see the king's face again; nor shall he be troubled by Mordecai's uplifted form evermore. "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you" (2 Thess. i. 6). The ungodly may now be supreme, while to the righteous "waters of a full cup" are wrung out; "but the triumphing of the wicked is short." God is still the moral Governor of the world, to whom all men must give an account. He will manifest His power eventually when "all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. iv. 1). This passage has no reference to judgment after death. It is not the unsaved dead being cast into the lake of fire. It refers solely and simply to God's judgments which will be meted out to the oppressors of His people at the end of this age. Of this Haman's case gives us a hint.

The chamberlains, quick to discern the mind of the king, waste no sympathy on the fallen premier. "Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold, also, the gallows fifty cubits high,

which Haman made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon" (ver. 9). So certain had the now friendless wretch been in the morning of his having no difficulty about getting the king's permission to hang the refractory Jew, that he appears to have made no secret of his intention. It is evident that Harbonah was quite familiar with it, and as it is very unlikely that such information had been vouchsafed after the procession through the street in the forenoon, it would seem that Haman had but added to his own discomfiture by explaining the purpose of his early visit to some of the chamberlains before being summoned to the royal presence. The attendant mentions now the fact of the gallows having been erected, and the reason for it. Mordecai would have been strung up there had not Providence interfered. The king, hearing of it, utters but three words, "Hang him thereon," and the Amalekite's doom is sealed.

It is not the only time in Scripture history that in God's governmental dealings such a thing has occurred. Daniel furnishes us with a similar instance. Saved himself by Almighty power from the lions' jaws, his accusers are cast into the den and destroyed. David wrote of the wicked; "Behold he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit

and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate" (Ps. vii. 14-16). So shall it be with the personal Antichrist, "the Jews' enemy" of the future, of whom Haman, if not a type, is at least an illustration. At the moment when his power shall seem to be supreme, and all hope for deliverance for the Remnant of Israel, who in that dark day shall cleave to the Lord, will have practically fled away, the warrior of the 19th of Revelation shall descend and hurl the impious usurper alive into the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified" (ver. 10). The sentence, as soon as uttered, is carried out. Haman is hanged as one "accursed of God." Thus "the righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead" (Prov. xi. 8). "Riches profit not in the day of wrath;" his wealth and power availed him nothing. In one moment all is manifested as being altogether lighter than vanity. He has gone out into eternity naked and alone; and as a later revelation tells us, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Heb. ix, 27). That stark, cold body suspended to the gallows preaches loudly, to all who will give heed, of the

evanescent character of all earth's baubles, and the importance of living for eternity.

"I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found" (Ps. xxxvii. 35, 36.)

CHAPTER VIII

THE DESPISED MAN EXALTED AND THE DECREE OF GRACE

IT was not enough that Haman should be put to death. Some means must be devised whereby the people of the Jews could be saved and yet the unalterable laws of the Persians and the Medes remain unviolated. Of this the present chapter treats.

"On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman" (vers. 1, 2).

The power of the enemy is overthrown. Haman's house is presented to Esther and she appoints Mordecai over it. She tells at last what relation he bore to her, and there is nothing more to hide.

Her discipline, and his too, had been severe, but at last both reach a place where they can be used in blessing to their people. There must

ever be a divine schooling ere there can be usefulness and enlargement. But although the circumstances are so remarkably altered, the decree condemning "all Jews, both young and old, little children and women," to be slain on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month still stands unrevoked. Nor can it be revoked—for the laws of the kingdom once made were unchangeable. But strong in faith that some means would be found whereby the evil might be averted, and yet the dignity of the laws remain untouched, we are told that "Esther spake yet again before the king and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews" (ver. 3). The position of her people was strikingly analogous to that of unsaved men and women in general; conscious of having richly deserved the judgment of God, the curse of the broken law hanging over their heads: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. iii. 10; Deut. xxvii. 26). So runs the unchangeable decree of a holy God. All are worthy of death; for all have sinned. None have continued in obedience to all the commandments of God. Therefore all are under the curse. It will not do to plead ignorance of the law, or sorrow for having failed. "The soul that sinneth *it shall die*." The law knows no mercy for the

violator of it. Neither will it do to promise to do better in days to come; to endeavor to obey the Word in the future. A better future, if that were to be, could not change the past—and "God requireth that which is past" (Eccl. iii. 15).

If saved at all, it cannot be at the expense of God's character or by the violation of His word in any manner whatsoever.

But it is right here that the gospel comes in. God can say, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (Job xxxiii. 24). The Lord Jesus has borne the sinner's judgment. Yea, "God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. v. 21). He, ever spotless and undefiled, was not under the curse. The sentence of condemnation did not hang over Him. But in infinite love and mercy He stooped vicariously beneath our load, and "bare our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. ii. 24). "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. liii 5). A righteous basis has now been laid, upon which God can act according to the love of His heart, and yet in perfect holiness. A second decree goes forth, not contradicting or annulling the former one; but which, while in perfect harmony with it, will provide a means whereby all

can be saved who avail themselves thereof. So we read, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. iii. 13). The work that saves is finished. All can find deliverance from the judgment of God who in simple faith receive and act upon the message of grace.

And so, returning to our chapter, it is beautifully in keeping with this that "the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther." Grace is reigning and upon that ground alone can there be deliverance for her people. "So Esther arose, and stood before the king, and said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" (vers. 4-6.)

It is a touching plea that she gives utterance to. It hangs on this, "If the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his sight." She does not attempt to plead the good works, the benevolence, or the loyalty of the Jews. She would have him deal with them according to his

estimate of her. Like the great apostle of the Gentiles who, when entreating Philemon in behalf of Onesimus writes, "If thou count me therefore a partner receive him as myself" (Phile. 17). And surely we have more than a hint, both there and here, of the great and wondrous truth expressed in the blessed words of inspiration, "He hath made us accepted in the Beloved." Esther had risked her life for her people and would now have them dealt with according to the king's thoughts of herself. The Lord Jesus Christ gave His life a ransom for lost, guilty sinners, and now all who trust in Him are dealt with by God according to His thoughts of His Son. How tenderly this precious truth is expressed in the Lord's great intercessory prayer! He says, "I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and *hast loved them even as Thou hast loved Me*" (John xvii. 23).

Esther's touching plea avails, and "the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen, and Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also for the Jews as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man

reverse" (vers. 7, 8). He who "had the power of death" has been destroyed. The message of grace can now be sent out "to deliver those who through fear of death" had been subjected to so cruel a bondage.

"Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third month, that is the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, a hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing and according to their language" (ver. 9). Less than nine months remained ere the decree of Haman was due to be put into execution. Short enough time if the message of grace was to reach the farthest limits of the kingdom ere the day of slaughter appointed! The proclamation is as universal as the previous one, and is written in every language of the known world. Its text is given in the verses that follow.

"And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by post on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather them-

selves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for prey, upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month which is the month Adar" (vers. 10-12). It will be seen that this proclamation in no sense contradicted the one that had gone before. The other gave the people command to destroy the Jews. This one gave to the afflicted nation the privilege of defending themselves. In other words it provided a means of salvation which they could accept or reject as they chose. It is not otherwise with the glad tidings proclaimed in the gospel. A Saviour is provided. All who avail themselves of God's gracious interference are saved. All who reject the means of His providing, do so at their own peril.

No time is lost in sending out the joyful tidings. Would that Christians were as much in earnest in making known to all people, far and near, the good news of eternal salvation through a crucified and risen Saviour! "The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on

by the king's commandment. And the decree was given in Shushan the palace" (vers. 13, 14). To every corner of the habitable earth, the messengers go forth "being hastened" by the monarch's word, reminding us forcibly of another commission given by a greater than Ahasuerus: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach (Gk., "disciple") all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matt. xxviii. 18-20). His commandment was urgent. Men were in danger of something far worse than temporal destruction—in danger of the eternal judgment of God against sin. Nothing was to hinder. "Go ye," He says. And, commissioned by the Lord Himself, they went forth to make known to Jew and Gentile the exceeding riches of His grace.

But what lethargy has come in since those early days of devotion to His name! What millions of heathen are unevangelized in this vaunted century of progress and enlightenment. Solemn indeed must be the reckoning with those by and by who are so indifferent to "the King's commandment." What would have been thought of one of the couriers of Ahasuerus who, forgetting

the urgency and importance of his message, loitered among the leafy bowers of the wayside khans, or amused himself with the sights of the way; losing valuable time; forgetting that hundreds of lives depended upon his errand being fulfilled ere the thirteenth day of the month Adar. Would such an one not have justly deserved the severest censure, if not death itself? And what is to be thought of Christians who have heard the charge of the Lord Jesus, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15), but who, paying no attention to the appalling condition of lost souls on every side of them, think only of their own pleasure and comfort? "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain, if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not He that pondereth the heart consider it? And He that keepeth thy soul, doth He not know it? And shall not He render to every man according to his works?" (Prov. xxiv. 11, 12). These are unspeakably solemn words and worthy of being carefully pondered in the presence of God by every converted reader of these lines. May grace be given to each one to weigh well their solemn import, and to seek day by day to faithfully make known the only message which can deliver from the second death.

"And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment

of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad" (ver. 15). The condemnation past, Mordecai puts off the sackcloth, to be worn no more. Robed now as befits his exalted position he goes into the king's presence. His clothing of blue and white and purple may surely have a meaning for our hearts to enter into. Blue is the color of the heavens, and ever seems to speak, in Scripture, of that heavenly character which should be manifested by the redeemed soul. White is righteousness, and put on as a habit tells of the practical righteousness that should adorn the child of God. Of this too the fine linen reminds us for "the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Rev. xix. 8). The purple is the color of royalty; while the "great crown of gold" would tell of the divine glory, in harmony with which Mordecai has now been raised from the depths of woe to the heights of power and blessing: blessing not for himself alone, but for all who harken to his word. And so, from time to time, even in the broken condition of things in which we see the professing Church to-day, does God raise up men who will honor Him in honoring His Word, and who are thus made a means of untold blessing to others.

The king's message *believed* brought joy and gladness; even as the gospel, believed, brings the same to-day. "The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor. And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's command-

ment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (vers. 16, 17). It is important to notice that it was the word of the king which brought all the grief and anguish of heart described in chapter four. The king had spoken. They believed his decree, and they were miserable. Now it is his word that gives them peace and happiness, and drives away their sorrow. Even so, God's word as to man's lost estate and the judgment hanging over him brings the soul to cry, "The pains of hell gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow" (Psa. cxvi. 3). But by the message of grace and truth which has come by Jesus Christ, truly believed, the gloom is banished, and the exultant heart cries with joy, "Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling" (Psa. cxvi. 8). It is in neither case a question of experience or wrought-up feelings, but of *faith in the message proclaimed.*

And so God had turned the mourning of His people into rejoicing, and the result was that the fear of them fell upon the people of the provinces, many of whom sought the God of Israel and became proselytes, taking their places as members of the chosen nation. There is nothing that so appeals to the world as a happy, holy company of saints, whose spirits have been refreshed by the goodness of the Lord.

CHAPTER IX 1–19

THE DELIVERANCE

IT was faith in the written word of the king that gave the Jews joy and gladness, even though the formerly dreaded thirteenth of Adar had not yet come. So does faith in the written word of God give boldness and confidence though the day of doom once feared has not yet arrived. The revelation of His grace and "perfect love" as revealed in the cross "casteth out all fear," for "faith is the substance" (or confidence) "of things hoped for, the evidence" (or conviction) "of things not seen" (Heb. xi. 1). "We walk by faith, not by sight," for "what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. viii. 24, 25). It was not an inward emotion or a passing feeling that gave to the people of Esther and Mordecai the assurance that they would not be destroyed, as originally intended by Haman. They had something far better than that. Their tears were dried, their sorrow assuaged in resting upon the word alone.

This cannot be insisted on too strongly. There

are many to-day seeking peace in an utterly wrong way. Some hope, because of a restful feeling within, that they have at last been accepted of God, and are now on the way to heaven. Others trust in the fact that they pray and attend to various religious duties; while many more are without any confidence at all, but hope at last to have an inward sense of pardon ere they die. To all of these classes we would say, Do not rest in anything short of the revealed word of God. That Word *believed,* joy and peace must follow; but it is faith first, peace afterwards.

To go direct to Scripture is the only safe way for every soul. For instance: I am a sinner; my awakened conscience troubles me about many things I had formerly treated as matters of indifference; an awful sense of condemnation and wrath hangs over me; I long for deliverance. I pray, and groan, and weep. Still there is no peace. I try to change my ways; break loose from old habits; forsake evil companions,—I am miserable even then. I perhaps go to church; submit to baptism; partake of the Lord's Supper; give of my means to assist the cause of Christ. But alas, alas, all is in vain! I am only more and more aware of my true state since so great changes seem to be necessary to fit me for God's presence. I have no assurance that my sins are forgiven: and it is this I must know if I would be at peace. At last, wearied and almost

hopeless, I come to the Word itself. Perhaps such a passage as Acts xiii. 38, 39 meets my eye: "Be it *known* unto you." Ah yes, that is it! I want to KNOW. This awful uncertainty is what is harassing me and taking from me all rest, and plunging me into deepest anxiety. What is it that can be "known" in this verse? "Be it known unto you that through *this Man*"—that is, through Jesus—not through my prayers, my devotions, my benevolences, or my changed manner of life! Nor yet through the church, her services, her ministers or her ordinances. No! blessed be God, I am turned from all these things—good as they may be in their place; I am turned to "this Man," to Jesus—the Man of Calvary—the Man who is now in the glory. "Through this Man is preached unto *you*,"—how intensely personal it is: "known unto you;" "preached unto you;"—surely, then I cannot be mistaken in appropriating it to myself. "Preached unto you the *forgiveness of sins!*" Ah! That is what I want so earnestly. This is what I can never be happy without. How, then, is this preached forgiveness to be really mine,—known and enjoyed as mine? Here is the answer: "By Him *all* that *believe are justified* from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Here, then, is the peace-giving testimony of God's infallible Word. I can rest on that. I believe in the Lord Jesus. He died for me. I trust in Him alone.

God declares all who so believe are "justified from all things." I can trust His declaration. I have sure and perfect peace. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. v. 1, 2).

Resting on the word of the king, the Jews found peace. Now we are to learn how the word of the king is actually fulfilled. "Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put into execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them,) the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people" (vers. 1, 2). The day that had been so dreaded, ere the posts brought the message of grace, is now awaited with eager anticipation. It is to be a day of triumph and rejoicing to the Jews, and a day of overthrowing the power of their enemies. The government is for, not against, them. This is the reason of their gladness. "And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the

king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater" (vers. 3, 4).

How truly had the word been fulfilled which says, "Them that honor Me, I will honor; and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"! It will be remembered that in the beginning, when Mordecai sided with God, and refused to bow to the haughty enemy of Jehovah, that the king's servants wondered "whether Mordecai's matters would *stand*." How has the Lord vindicated His servant now! Not only have his matters stood, but the despised man who acted for God—although that meant at the time to be misunderstood by almost every one else—is now waxing greater and greater. And so will it ever be that he who sides with God will be triumphant at last. It is not to be expected that natural men, or carnal Christians, will understand a man who takes this ground. "He that is spiritual discerneth all things; yet he himself is discerned of no man" (1 Cor. ii. 15—literal rendering). Such an one must ever be an enigma to men who reason from a human standpoint, and who have not the mind of Christ. But God will vindicate His servant in His own way and time, if all is humbly left in His hands. Of the greatest of all servants it is written that "when He was reviled,

He reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. ii. 23). And how gloriously has He been vindicated and exalted! Blessed Lord, may we Thy servants walk in Thy path until we see Thy face!

"Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men" (vers. 5, 6). It was the overthrowing of the enemies—not of the Jews only, but of the Lord. They impiously lifted their hands against the separated nation; and, however unfaithful they may have been, He made their troubles His own, and delivered their foes into their hands.

The Lord remembers, too, His word as to Amalek spoken in the wilderness so long ago: "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Hence we read of the destruction of the last of the nation mentioned in Scripture. "And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, and Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but *on the spoil laid they not their hand*" (vers. 7-10). The last of this ungodly race have perished. God's word, whether telling of grace or judgment, will be fulfilled to the letter.

As typifying the lusts of the flesh, what comfort there is for the Christian in the utter destruction of Amalek! The day is not far distant when the old nature that dwells in every believer, and is the cause of so much of our failure, and sins, and sorrow, will be completely removed; and with it all lust and pride: yea, everything that hinders spiritual enjoyment will be gone forever. This never occurs while we are in the body. The dream of the eradication of inbred sin, and of perfection in the flesh while in this life, is not founded on the word of God. As long as we are in this scene we have to "mortify" our members which are upon the earth; but at "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto Him," we shall be fully delivered from our hated foe: "for our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body" (or, transform the body of our humiliation), "that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory" (literal rendering); "according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself" (Phil. iii. 20, 21). Then will the remembrance of the fleshly lusts that war against the soul, and now trouble us, be blotted out from under heaven.

A striking evidence of subjection to God is brought before us at the end of the verses noted above: "upon the spoil they laid not their hand." The king had granted "the spoil of them for a

prey." But long before, God had said, when sending Saul to smite the Amalekites, that he should "utterly destroy all that they had." They were to take no spoil that day. Saul disobeyed the word and brought down Divine judgment upon himself and his house (1 Sam. xv, throughout). The scattered Jews of Esther's time manifest greater faithfulness. They abhor the spoil and refrain from touching it. As it was an Amalekite that had stirred up the enmity of the people against them, they class all morally in the same category. It is an example of disinterested obedience beautiful to notice. They overcome the world but do not seek to profit through it nor derive benefit by indifference to that which they see to be evil.

The news of the slaughter in the city of Shushan is reported to the king at the close of the day. "And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done" (ver. 12).

It would seem from Esther's reply that the day had closed in the midst of the conflict. There were still a large number of persons who were evil disposed toward the Jews. "Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which

are in Shushan to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows" (ver. 13). It must be borne in mind that the decree simply granted the Jews the privilege of self-defense. It is no indiscriminate massacre that Esther desires, but another day of opportunity in which to meet their foes if they sought to rise against them. She also desires the ten sons of Haman to be hung up before the people as accursed according to Deut. xxi, 22, 23. "And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons" (ver. 14).

On the fourteenth day of the month therefore the Jews again met any who had the hardihood to oppose them, and "slew three hundred men at Shushan," over half the number of the previous day. Again we are told that "on the prey they laid not their hands" (ver. 15). They would not be enriched at the expense of the enemies of the Lord.

Throughout the rest of the empire they had been equally victorious. We read not of the death of even so much as one; but they "slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey" (ver. 16). Truly their sorrow had been turned into rejoicing. "Weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning."

In the outside districts and distant provinces the fourteenth day was devoted to feasting and gladness, while in the palace-city the day following was so observed. It was a season of thanksgiving and congratulations one to another: gifts and portions being exchanged. From our record of it though, as described in vers. 17-19, it would be impossible to prove that they remembered the Lord in it all, and gave the glory to Him. This, however, is but in keeping with the character of the book. There can be no question as to their hearts going out in gratitude to the God of their fathers who had so mercifully interfered on their behalf; but in describing their joy, as in making known their former sorrow, His name is unmentioned in the record, because they are not where He can publicly own them. How loudly does this very silence speak to every opened ear! God could do all we have been noting in our study of this book for His people who refused to gather to the place where He has set His name (and where a few "afflicted and poor" ones were trying amidst many discouragements to rebuild His ruined temple and to order their ways according as "they found it written"), but though He so graciously watches over them in His providence, and loves them unto the end, He nevertheless takes care that the inspired record of it all shall not so much as mention His name.

CHAPTER IX 20–32

THE INSTITUTION OF PURIM

FROM this time, until he disappears from sacred history, Mordecai takes the place of a judge or a deliverer among his brethren. He has proven himself a faithful man in the main, whatever failures he may also have had. In a certain sense his position is very similar to that occupied by Joseph in Egypt. In position being next to the king, he has been the preserver of his people and is afterwards their protector.

He would have them never forget the great deliverance they had known, nor the means whereby it had been accomplished. From the twentieth verse, it has generally been concluded that he himself was the author of this book, and surely no person would be more likely to have been chosen for this service. He also, in conjunction with Esther the queen, established the feast of Purim, or "the lot," as a perpetual commemoration of the overthrowing of Haman's device.

"And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, to establish

this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor" (vers. 20-22). There is no reason to believe that this was a divinely instituted festival, like the seven feasts of Jehovah in Lev. xxiii. It was simply the grateful remembrance of a rejoicing people for signal mercy vouchsafed at a time of deepest distress. Naturally the Jews in the land did not as readily observe it as those scattered among the heathen. History tells us that it was some years ere it became a universal season of festivity among the Hebrews, and many more elapsed before a distinctively religious character was given to it.

But, as commanded by Mordecai and Esther, all was in perfect keeping with the times. In full accord with their Lo-ammi condition, God's name is in no wise connected with it. It has kept, however, the record of their providential deliverance clearly before their minds. The exact reason for the name of the feast is given in the verses that follow: "And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy

of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them; but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters, that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged upon the gallows. Wherefore they called these days Purim, after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, the Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed" (vers. 23-28).

How truly had they been made to know that "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. xvi. 33). No device of the wicked against the people of the Lord can ever be carried out unless He see fit to permit it. Hence the Christian can exultingly cry, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. viii.

31). But, though His care is over all His saints, it will always be observed that there is not that same direct, manifest interference on their behalf when not walking according to His revealed will, as when they take the place of absolute dependence on Himself in subjection to His Word. Thus also in Christendom generally, it is more this distant Providential oversight that is known.

In an indefinite way saints learn to look for divine interposition for evidence of the Lord's concern. But it is only as one walks with God and trembles at His word, manifesting real heart for Himself, that the special supervision and intimate Fatherly care of which Scripture speaks is entered into and enjoyed. This may be seen by turning for a little to that exceedingly striking passage in 2 Cor. vi. 14-18. Believers are here counseled to avoid putting their necks into an unequal yoke with those who believe not. This would refer to every concern of life; whether it be in regard to business, marriage, or ecclesiastical associations. No child of God can be linked up with an unconverted man in a business partnership without violating this Scripture. Neither could one enter into an engagement or marriage with an unsaved person and enjoy the approbation of the Lord. An old Puritan once wrote, "If you marry a child of the devil you can expect to have trouble with your father-in-law." Alas, that so many, despising

the Word of truth and the bitter experiences of thousands before them, should, with open eyes, yet venture on such a course, because through their affections they have been ensnared! How many Samsons have been thus shorn of their strength! And how many Solomons have thus had their hearts turned away!

But there are many who see the nature of the business yoke and the family yoke, who seem quite unconcerned as to the ecclesiastical association with the world. "What agreement hath the *temple of God* with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God." Believers, and believers alone, comprise this spiritual house. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. iii. 16). Of no unregenerate soul could this be said. Of those only who are born again and sealed with the Holy Spirit can it be true. It is therefore of the greatest importance that Christians refuse all association with worldlings in spiritual things. This is beautifully set forth in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, where the faithful remnant, having come up from Babylon and Persia, are found not only separate from the nations, but, when gathered at the place where Jehovah's name had been set of old, they indignantly refuse the help of the uncircumcised in building the house of God or the walls of the city. For them, despite the fact that the Lo-Ammi

sentence remained unrepealed, God could act in a more open and manifest way than when He interfered for the scattered ones of the provinces who separated not from the nations when they had the opportunity presented to them in the imperial decree. For this remnant, He raised up suited ministry. Haggai and Zechariah were able to give with no uncertainty "the Lord's message." When failure came in, they were in the place where all could be dealt with according to the Book; while teachers of the Law, like Ezra and the Levites, were given to them to instruct them in what was there written.

And so in the passage we have under consideration, God says to those who "come out from among them," and who "touch not the unclean thing," that He will receive them; and He adds, "I will be a Father *unto you,* and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." This is unspeakably precious. God is the Father of all who are born again. All such have life eternal—divine life, and can say by the Spirit, "Abba Father;" but though He is the Father *of* all, He is not able always to act as a Father *unto* all.

It is the obedient who know His gracious and special care spoken of in this sense. Leaving all else for Him, they find Him to be more than all else to them, even in regard to temporal matters.

"He knows, and loves, and cares;
Nothing this truth can dim:
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him."

Separated to Himself, dependent alone upon His omnipotent power, they are given to see His hand and to discern His actings in grace as others cannot who "follow afar off," and fear to leave all that is contrary to His mind, as revealed in His Word.

How blessed is it, on the other hand, that even where there is not this devotion to Himself that should characterize those redeemed at such cost, yet He never forgets His own, nor does He ever neglect them. But it is more in the manner of His actings in the days of Esther that He watches over and cares for them—often unseen and unacknowledged. "His mercy endureth forever," and He who walked with His unbelieving people for forty years in the wilderness never ceases to care for His children now, however little they may realize it. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end" (John xiii. 1).

The feast of Purim, then, witnesses the nation's gratitude, however feebly it may set forth their recognition that it was God Himself who had so wondrously made their affliction the occasion for His acting in grace.

"Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abi-

hail" (Father of strength), "and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with *words of peace and truth,* to confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed the matters of the fastings and their cry" (vers. 29-31). It is not likely that the name of God was left unmentioned in the publications they thus put forth, for "words of peace and truth" clearly connected the humiliation of the people and their fasting, with the deliverance God gave them at the end. "Their cry" is also mentioned. To whom could it be but to God? Were this narration of it then written by mere man, how natural would it have been to have added the words "to God" or "to the Lord." But the pen of inspiration never errs. The One whose ways are perfect, is the real author of the book, whether Mordecai or some unknown one was the writer.

"And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book" (ver. 32). To the present day, and for ages past, it has been the custom of the Hebrews to read this book at the annual observance of the feast; and whenever the

name of Haman is uttered, the orthodox Jews hiss, and stamp, and curse his memory.

In the days when our Lord was upon earth, the canon of Old Testament Scripture, as we now know it, had been long since completed, and was composed of "the law, the prophets, and the Psalms." Esther was always included in the latter division, called in the Greek version "the Hagiographa." Jesus spoke of all as Scripture. Therefore we cannot question the full inspiration of this book, as He set His seal upon it. And yet we shall look in vain to find any quotation from or reference to it in the New Testament. It is the unique evidence of God's unfailing care to a faithless people.

The feast of Purim is never referred to in the Gospels either. It did not properly belong to the people as in the land. While the yearly reminder of unchanging grace, it was also the evidence of their lack of heart for the One who had so acted towards them. At the present time it has degenerated into a season of godless merry-making, and is more patriotic than devotional in character.

CHAPTER X

SPEAKING PEACE

THE story of Satan's effort to destroy the nation of promise, together with the manner in which he was thwarted, having been so minutely told, there remains nothing more than to picture the changed conditions resultant upon the destruction of Haman and his house, and the advancement of Mordecai. The far-reaching rule of the Persian monarch is first shown in the statement that "the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land and upon the isles of the sea" (ver. 1). All nations had to know and own his power, as soon they shall own the sway of God's chosen King. How blessed the day when

> "Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
> Doth his successive journeys run:
> His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
> Till moons shall wax and wane no more."

"The powers that be are ordained of God:" but all are merely provisional during the present period of the true King's rejection. Soon shall this groan-

ing scene be changed to one of unmingled joy and gladness for the delivered nations when there shall be revealed from heaven "a righteous ruler over men, a ruler in the fear of God!" This, Ahasuerus was not. Consequently his world-wide domination soon passed to other hands; but when God's Anointed reigns, His kingdom will never be superseded.

Let the reader not fall into a mistake very commonly made to-day. The Kingdom is not the Church. The latter is the body of Christ, composed of all who, in this dispensation, are called out from Jew and Gentile, and baptized in the power of the Holy Spirit. During the period in which God is doing this special work of His grace, the Kingdom, properly speaking, is in abeyance. It is true the principles of the Kingdom are spreading through the world, and all who are born again are, even now, in, and morally of it.

But for all that the reigning time has not yet come. It is still "the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." When the Lord returns from heaven He will descend "with a shout" into the upper air, accompanied by "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God." The Church will then be complete and her period of testimony and rejection on earth will be accomplished. Therefore "the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with

them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be forever with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 16, 17; see also 1 Cor. xv. 51-56).

This will be the end of the Christian dispensation, but *not* the end of the world. There are other periods to follow. The first will be very brief, and is commonly referred to in Scripture as "the great tribulation," "the hour of trial," and "the time of Jacob's trouble." In this season (with which a great part of the Scripture is occupied, notably Matt. xxiv, and the bulk of the Revelation—chaps. iv-xix inclusive), the Jewish nation will once more be taken up by God. A remnant of them in their unprecedented tribulation will turn to His Word and will there see that, on account of their rejection of Messiah, they had been given up to partial blindness "until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in." That time having been reached at the rapture of the Church, God will then open their eyes to their great sin. They will acknowledge the Crucified as the Anointed of Jehovah, and will separate themselves from the ungodly mass to wait for His appearing as their deliverer. In the land of Palestine one will arise of whom Haman is a fit type—the personal Antichrist, referred to in Scripture under various titles, as "the king" of Dan. xi. 36, who "shall do according to his own will;" "the idol shepherd" of Zech. xi. 15-17; one who "shall come in his own name" in John v. 43; "the wicked"

or "lawless one" of 2 Thess. ii, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders;" and the two-horned beast of Rev. xiii, who has the appearance of a lamb, to simulate the Lamb of God, but is betrayed by his speech, which is that of a dragon. This fearful character will be the bitter persecutor of the faithful Jews for a short period, but as in the matter of Haman and Mordecai, when all seems darkest, the Lord shall appear for the destruction of the power of evil and the salvation of His people. Then follows the establishment of the kingdom which is never to be given to another, when for one thousand years the Lord Jesus shall reign over all the earth.

Whenever world-wide dominion has been entrusted to man, he has, as in all else, utterly failed. But when "He shall come whose right it is," He will judge the nations in righteousness and manifest Jehovah's perfect rule on earth. This is the Kingdom which is the burden of the Old Testament prophecies and which is frequently referred to in the New Testament. One passage from this latter portion we shall here quote. "Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself: that in the *dispensation of the fulness of times* He might gather together (or head up) in one all things in Christ, both which

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are in heaven and which are on earth; even in Him" (Eph. i. 10, 11). When that long-waited-for dispensation arrives, "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." The heavenly saints will then be associated with their Lord in government, while saints on earth will, with rejoicing, own His beneficent sway.

Misrule and oppression will have ceased forever. Earth's long wail will have changed to a song of unending praise to the Lamb once slain.* We cannot forbear referring the reader to one beautiful passage, this time from the Psalms, ere leaving this intensely interesting subject. We refer to Psalm lxxii, where Messiah's kingdom is described most vividly. After telling how "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass," bringing refreshment and blessing to this poor parched world, we read that "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down

*The attentive reader who may desire further light on the Kingdom and connected themes will find great help in "Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects," by W. Trotter. $1.50. At the same publishers.

before Him: all nations shall serve Him" (vers. 8-11). No wonder that at the conclusion of the recital of His glories the inspired singer writes, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended"! All will be then as it should be; for the whole earth will be full of His glory.

The evanescent character of human greatness and the crumbling kingdoms of earth as contrasted with the "stone kingdom" yet to come are well brought out in the second verse of our chapter in Esther. "And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?" These books are probably lost beyond recall. God has, however, preserved His own record of the events of those days. Were it not for this, we should never have known from secular history of Mordecai and of God's intervention for the preservation of His people in the land of their exile.

Ahasuerus' power was of the fading glory of this world. He is gone, and his records have perished. Mordecai had the interests of Jehovah at heart, despite the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed. His faithfulness will be remembered forever. "For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren,

seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed" (ver. 3). He appears as a thoroughly disinterested, unselfish person, who, though honored by the proud conqueror, never acts now as of old, when he counseled Esther against revealing her kindred; but is a guileless man, known to all as a Jew, and using his power for the blessing of the once jeopardized nation.

That from time to time, even where there is much that is contrary to the mind of God, He manifests His unbounded grace by giving to His people such deliverers is evident both in Scripture and in the dark and sorrowful annals of the Church on earth. Let no one conclude from this fact that it is a matter of small moment to Him if His saints go on with that which is contrary to His revealed Word. It is one thing to know a Father's love and care, even though walking in self-chosen paths; it is another thing, like Enoch, to walk with God and have the testimony that one is pleasing Him.

As an evidence of how feebly man enters into Divine design in Scripture, I would draw attention, ere closing, to the well-known fact that in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, and found in English in the Apocrypha, there are a number of additions to the book of Esther which are commonly supposed to be the work of pious Egyptian Jews who were troubled by the omission of all reference to God, and therefore supplemented

the book with productions of their own, in which the glory would all be given to Him. These interpolations are rightly rejected in our version, as they never formed part of the Hebrew text, and were written after the voice of prophecy had ceased, in the days of Malachi. In one of these added portions, Haman is referred to as a Macedonian whose desire it was to turn the kingdom to his people. This would be quite in keeping with the times in which they were written. The Persian empire was overthrown, as we know, by Alexander the Great, whose Macedonian troops so readily routed the luxurious Iranian armies.

Man cannot tamper with God's word save to his ruin, and to the marring of that which is absolutely perfect in itself. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God (literally, God-breathed), and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. iii. 16, 17).

May writer and reader seek, ever more and more, to walk as men of God; thus finding in every portion of Holy Writ divine furnishing for our path through this scene.

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